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The Impact of Legal Status
on Sexual Minority and Parental Stress
for Parents in Same-Sex Relationships

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THE IMPACT OF LEGAL STATUS ON SEXUAL MINORITY AND PARENTAL
STRESS FOR PARENTS IN SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

by

Teresa LeAnn Reeves

A Dissertation

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Abstract

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Often only one parent in a same-sex relationship is permitted to have legal parenting rights to the children, even when they have planned the children together. Prohibiting parents from being legally recognized as parents to their children is an issue that is unique to same-sex couples. Based on sexual minority stress theory, I hypothesized that same-sex parents without legal rights would report more sexual minority stress (i.e., less disclosure of sexual orientation and experience significantly more stigma consciousness, internalized homophobia, and discrimination) and more parental stress (including family worry and the need for parental justification) than same-sex parents with legal rights, and that this effect would be above and beyond the contribution of social support, and the effects of age, gender, education, and number of children in the home. This study was conducted via an online survey with 418 participants, 75% of which were female and 85% were Caucasian. Non-legal status predicted greater worry about legal family issues and discrimination, but did not predict general worry about family issues. Additionally, same-sex parents who reported greater social support reported less parenting stress and sexual minority stress than did parents with less social support. Legal parenting status was not a significant unique predictor for parental stress, parental justification, internalized homophobia, stigma consciousness, or experiences of harassment and discrimination. However, social support was a significant positive predictor for both parental and sexual minority stress but not a significant predictor of worry about legal family issues and discrimination. In comparison to same-

sex parents with legal rights, same-sex parents without legal rights may carry greater worry and concern about the lack of legal rights and the discrimination they may encounter, and social support does not appear to predict less worry. However, the results suggest that same-sex parents, with and without legal rights, overall appear to have low parental and minority stress. Implications for same-sex couples, families, and social policy are discussed.

keywords: lesbian, gay, parents, minority stress, parental stress, social support

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Although approximately 20 countries provide legal parenting rights to same-sex couples as a matter of basic human rights (Badgett, 2004), most states in the United States do not permit same-sex couples to create a legal union or have equal parenting rights. Currently, only five states and Washington D.C. permit marriage between same-sex couples, and six states provide civil unions or domestic partnership benefits (HRC, 2010). The denial of marriage rights prevents these families from having numerous rights, benefits, and protections which are represented by 1138 federal statutory provisions as well as numerous state benefits (Pawelski et al., 2006; U.S. General Accounting Office, 2004). Among these rights and privileges are many related to the role of family and parenting.

Restrictions placed on same-sex families affects a large portion of citizens in this country. Same-sex couples are increasingly forming families through adoption, foster care, and reproductive technologies (Buell, 2001). While there is no official count (HRC, 2009), some sources estimate that there are 6 to 10 million same-sex parents in the United States with approximately 14 million children (Buell, 2001). The Williams Institute estimates that about 65,500 adopted children and more than 14,100 foster children are currently being raised by same-sex couples. Over one third of lesbians have given birth, and one sixth of gay men have either fathered or adopted a child (Gates, Badgett, Macomber, & Chambers, 2007). These statistics indicate that a significant number of parents are prevented from having equal rights.

Same-sex couples have been denied equal family rights based on beliefs that same-sex families are not as healthy as those of heterosexual families (Badgett, 2004). Despite the fact that they may have barriers not faced by heterosexual parents, these same-sex parents appear to provide homes that are just as healthy as those of heterosexual parents. Multiple studies have found that children of same-sex parents are as well adjusted as those of heterosexual parents (see Meezan & Rauch, 2005, and Stacey & Biblarz, 2001, for a review). Adoptive fathers have reported similar parenting abilities and levels of stress regardless of their sexual orientation (Lichtanski, 2004). Lesbian and heterosexual mothers have reported no differences in stress, adjustment, competence, or quality of the family relationship (McNeill, Rienzi, & Kposowa, 1998; Patterson, 2001). However, many of these studies have focused primarily or exclusively on the biological or adoptive parent in comparison to heterosexual parents and have not considered the experiences of same-sex parents who may not have legal parenting rights.

Researchers have found few differences for same-sex couples with children in terms of their engagement in parenting (Blake, 2005; Bos, van Balen, van den Boom, & Sandfort, 2004; Patterson, 1995). Same-sex parents are mutually involved in their children's lives, regardless of biological connection or lack thereof (Brewaeys, Ponjaert, Van Hall, & Golombok, 1997; Parks, 1998; Patterson, 2000; Vanfraussen, Ponjaert-Kristoffersen, & Brewaeys, 2003), and same-sex parents typically divide tasks equally between themselves (Patterson, 1995). The most striking difference between parents who are biologically related to their children and parents who are not is that the non-biological parent is often not acknowledged or validated as a parent by their families of origin, their communities, medical doctors, or society at large (Crawford, 1987; Gartrell et al., 1999;

Muzio, 1999; Parks, 1998; Rohrbaugh, 1989). Even among those who describe having their parenting role acknowledged by their communities and families, many still perceive themselves to have unequal parenting roles due to restricted legal rights (Ben-Ari & Livni, 2006). In the limited research in this area, non-biological parents have not been found to differ in parenting stress levels in comparison to biological parents in the Netherlands, which provides equal rights for parents, regardless of sexual orientation (Bos et al., 2004).

In the United States, such discrepancy in legal status for same-sex couples with children exists because for same-sex parents often only one of the parents has legal rights to the couple's children while the other is considered a parent only by those individuals who wish to acknowledge the relationship (Buell, 2001). Second-parent and joint adoption, whereby two individuals become adoptive parents with full legal rights, is decided county by county and through state law (Hare & Skinner, 2008). Therefore, in a few states both same-sex parents have legal rights, whereas in most areas of the country it is less common to find two legal same-sex parents. In these areas, one parent is not permitted to make medical decisions for his or her children, cannot provide health insurance or federal survivor benefits to the children, and does not have recourse for custody or visitation if the parents end their relationship (Hare & Skinner, 2008; Hequembourg, 2004). The many barriers faced by those without legal parenting rights may lead to more stressful experiences both in parenting and in daily living as a sexual minority individual. However, little research has considered the effects of family status inequality on the well-being of families with same-sex parents (Weber, 2008). The purpose of the current study is to assess whether having legal rights predicts sexual

minority and parental stress for individuals in same-sex relationships, above and beyond other factors that predict sexual minority and parental stress. Until now, researchers have not explored the experiences of same-sex parents based on legal and non-legal status.

Sexual Minority Stress

Parents who plan and create families together but are not both permitted to be legally recognized as parents is a restriction faced specifically by same-sex couples. Stressors related to sexual orientation are collectively referred to as sexual minority stress. Minority stress theory has been used by Brooks (1981) and more recently by Meyer (1995, 2003) as a framework to understand the unique stressors that gay and lesbian individuals experience due to their sexual minority status. These stressors include internalized homophobia, disclosure of sexual orientation, stigma consciousness, expectations of rejection and heightened vigilance, as well as experiences of heterosexist events including discrimination and violence. Minority stressors have been found to predict demoralization, guilt, psychological distress, and psychiatric morbidity in lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals (Mays & Cochran, 2001; McGregor et al., 2001; Meyer, 1995; Szymanski, 2006). Literature addressing minority stress for transgender (T) individuals is limited (Levitt et al., 2010).

Like most LGBT individuals, parents in same-sex relationships experience minority stress. Lesbian mothers who report experiencing higher levels of sexual minority stress also report more symptoms of psychological distress than lesbian mothers with less sexual minority stress. Specifically, lesbian mothers who have reported higher perceived stigma and more experiences of heterosexism have reported more distress than lesbian mothers with lower levels of perceived stigma and fewer heterosexist experiences

(Lambert, 2002). Additionally, lesbian mothers who reported more experiences of rejection related to being a lesbian parent also reported more behavior problems with their children (Bos et al., 2004). However, researchers have not investigated whether these experiences of sexual minority stress are in part determined by the extent of legal parenting rights same-sex parents have. The current study will investigate whether same-sex parents who do not have legal parenting rights experience more sexual minority stress than parents who have legal parenting rights. Specifically, this researcher will consider if legal status of same-sex parents predicts stigma consciousness, internalized homophobia, sexual orientation disclosure, and experiences of harassment, discrimination, and violence.

Parental Stress

Same-sex parents without legal parenting rights may experience stress related to parenting to a greater degree than legal parents. Without legal rights, LGBT individuals may be open to numerous sources of stress that relate to their role as a parent. They may experience stress about being restricted from taking care of their children's needs including making medical decisions for their children or providing insurance benefits to their children. They may also experience heightened stress related to psychological aspects of legal status. For example, non-legal parents may feel anxiety because their relationship with their children is dependent on maintaining a relationship with their partner. Their role as a parent may be continually questioned or invalidated from many sources ranging from the children's grandparents to the children's schools (Gartrell et al., 2000; Lott-Whitehead & Tully, 1999). Although little research has considered parental stress for LGBT individuals, researchers have found that same-sex parents who have

experienced ridicule, marginalization, or exclusion have reported higher levels of parental stress than those who have not experienced these sexual minority stressors (Bos et al., 2004). Therefore, same-sex parents who do not have legal parenting rights are likely to experience more stress related to being a parent than parents whose relationships with their children are legally recognized.

In order to counter the effects of sexual minority stress, same-sex parents may feel the need to justify their parenting skills to others. In the current political and social environment, same-sex parents are exposed to messages about LGBT people being unfit parents. Same-sex parents could be faced with the desire to convince others that they are good parents as a counter to frequent negative messages in the media. Bos and colleagues (2004) found that same-sex parents who experience more stigma, rejection, and internalized homophobia tend to justify their parenting skills more than parents who have less sexual minority stress. Non-biological lesbian mothers have also reported a need to justify their ability to parent more than have heterosexual fathers. Non-legal parents may feel an even greater need than legal same-sex parents to justify their parenting skills because they lack formal recognition that they are parents. Often the legal argument for not giving both parents rights is that a family with same-sex parents creates a harmful environment for children (Badgett, 2004). Because of this, non-legal parents may feel that proving they are good parents might demonstrate that they deserve parenting rights.

Correlates of Sexual Minority and Parental Stress: Social Support, Age, Gender, Education, and Number of Children

Increased social support has been linked to less psychological distress and less internalized homophobia in the presence of sexual minority stressors (Kurdek, 1988; Lambert, 2002; Szymanski & Kashubeck-West, 2008; see also review by Szymanski, Kashubeck-West, & Meyer, 2008). Therefore, research indicates that social support plays an important role in affecting well-being, and may be an important buffer against stress (Green & Mitchell, 2002). The negative relationship between social support and sexual minority stress has been found specifically with lesbian mothers. Lambert (2002) found that lesbian mothers who had more social support reported fewer symptoms of distress. Social support has also been well established as a buffer against parenting stress in heterosexual parents, reducing psychological and somatic symptoms, psychological distress, depression, and anxiety (e.g., Koeske & Koeske, 1990; Quittner, Glueckauf, & Jackson, 1990). Gay adoptive fathers have reported more social support than heterosexual adoptive fathers, which may at least partially explain equal levels of parenting stress reported by both groups (Lichtanski, 2004). Thus, social support may have an important role in protecting same-sex parents from both sexual minority and parental stress. Because social support has been found to play such an important role in stress management, this researcher will control for its effects in our exploration of legal status as a predictor of sexual minority and parental stress.

Research indicates that the age of same-sex parents may contribute to sexual minority and parental stress. Greater internalized homophobia has been reported by younger LGBT individuals (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009). Often the levels of

internalized homophobia and stigma consciousness decline and disclosure increases with age as individuals move toward integrating an LGBT identity (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000). However, experiences of harassment, discrimination, and violence can increase with age and the passage of time as individuals have more life experiences. Age also has a role in parental stress, as younger mothers have reported experiencing more stress about being a parent than have older mothers (Konstantareas, 1989).

Gender differences have been found for aspects of sexual minority stress. Gay and bisexual men have reported more experiences of harassment than have lesbian and bisexual women (Herek, Gillis, Cogan, & Glunt 1997). Experiences of internalized homophobia have also been found to differ for gay men and lesbians. Internalized homophobia has been found to moderate between heterosexist events and psychological distress in men (Meyer, 1995) but not in women (Szymanski, 2006). Sbordone's 1993 study (as cited in Szymanski, Kashueck-West, & Meyer, 2008) found that gay men who had children reported less internalized homophobia than gay men who did not have children. However, when Burns (as cited in Szymanski et al., 2008) replicated this with women two years later, she found similar levels of internalized homophobia for lesbians whether they had children, wanted children, or did not want to have children. Thus, gender differences may exist for internalized homophobia in same-sex parents. Studies have found mixed results regarding differences for parental stress experienced by mothers versus fathers. Some research has found that mothers experience more parental stress than fathers (Konstantareas, 1989), while other studies have found no significant difference in parental stress based on parents' gender (Civick, 2008).

Education has been found to have an inverse relationship with both sexual minority and parental stress. Those with a higher education tend to disclose their sexual orientation sooner following engagement in same-sex activity than those with less education (Barrett, & Pollack, 2005). A significant relationship has been found between internalized homophobia and education in which those with more education report less internalized homophobia (Herek et al., 2009). Though the effect of education on parental stress in same-sex parents has not been considered, parental stress has been found to have less of an effect on heterosexual mothers who have more education than on heterosexual mothers with less education (Koeske & Koeske, 1990).

When studying parental stress, one must consider the number of children for whom the parents are caring. Koeske and Koeske (1990) described the number of children in the home as a “demand” because it affects the degree of attention, effort, and resources needed for parenting. Prior studies have established a link between caring for more children and having higher levels of parental stress (e.g., Taylor, Washington, Artinian, & Lichtenberg, 2007). Based on the research reviewed here, social support, age, gender, education, and number of children in the home will be controlled for in the present study.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The current study examined the relationship between legal status and sexual minority and parental stress for individuals in same-sex relationships who co-created their families. My research questions were: 1.) Does legal parenting status predict sexual minority stress (as assessed by stigma consciousness, internalized homophobia, experiences of discrimination, and outness) and parental stress (as assessed by parental

justification, family worry, and parental stress)? 2.) Does legal parenting status account for unique variance explained beyond predictors of sexual minority and parental stress including social support, age, gender, education, and number of children in the home? I hypothesized that same-sex parents without legal rights would report less disclosure of sexual orientation and experience significantly more stigma consciousness, internalized homophobia, discrimination, parental stress, family worry, and the need for parental justification than same-sex parents with legal rights. I also hypothesized that same-sex parents without legal rights would experience more sexual minority stress and parental stress than same-sex parents with legal rights above and beyond the contribution of social support, and the effects of age, gender, education, and number of children in the home.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used in this document and are defined here for clarity.

LGBT. Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals (Perez, Debord, & Bieschke, 2007).

Same-sex Parents. Two parents of a child who are of the same sex and identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB).

Legal Parents. Individuals who are legally recognized as parents within the jurisdiction they currently reside. To be legally recognized, parents must be either on the child's birth certificate or have completed a legal adoption that is recognized in their current home jurisdiction.

Non-legal Parents. Individuals who share parenting responsibilities with a legal parent but are not on the child's birth certificate and do not have adoption documents.

Second-parent Adoption. Adoption by a parent after the child already has one legal parent either through birth or adoption (Pawelski et al., 2006).

Co-parent Adoption or Joint Adoption. Adoption by both parents simultaneously (Pawelski et al., 2006).

Co-parenting Agreement. Document that defines the rights and responsibilities of both parents. Although this document may not be sufficient for retaining custody rights in a court, co-parenting agreements can assist in custody disputes by demonstrating that both parents are part of the family unit and consider themselves to have equal parenting status (HRC, 2009).

Sexual Minority Stress. Stress that is related to being a gay, lesbian, or bisexual individual. Components of sexual minority stress include internalized homophobia, stigma consciousness, expectations and experiences of harassment, rejection, and discrimination, and disclosure of sexual orientation (Meyer, 2003).

Parental Stress. Stress that is related to being a parent, including justification of parenting ability because of the stigma of being LGB (Bos et al., 2004).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The focus of the study is on legal status of same-sex parents and its relationship to minority and parental stress. These parents have planned their families with their partners, and they have created their families together. They are living in the same home and sharing parenting responsibilities in raising their children. However, in many areas of the country there are restrictions to second parent or co-adoption for same-sex parents with no biological connection to the child. The restrictions that prohibit both parents from being considered legal parents are based solely on the fact that both parents are the same sex. Non-legal same-sex parents may be faced with sexual minority stressors including stigma, discrimination, harassment, internalized homophobia, and managing disclosure of their sexual identity. They may also struggle with increased parental stress, including feeling the need to justify to others that they are good parents. This chapter will describe the literature on same-sex parenting and legal restrictions, some of the tangible and emotional effects on the family based on these limitations, and factors that may reduce the negative impact of these limitations.

Same-sex Parenting

Legal parenting rights for same-sex couples cannot be fully discussed without discussing marriage rights. According to Meezan and Rauch (2005), same-sex marriage would provide three types of benefits to children of same-sex couples. If couples were permitted to marry, their children would have more financial benefits including eligibility for insurance coverage through both parents, disability benefits if a parent becomes disabled, and survivor benefits and inheritance rights if a parent dies. Second, same-sex

couples would likely experience less psychological distress and increased well-being as married rather than co-habiting couples. Finally, children would benefit socially from their parents being able to marry. The authors explain that having the family legitimized would define the family unit in terms with which others could relate. This connects the children's grandparents on both sides of the family to the child, whether or not they are biologically related. The children's daycares, school, and other organizations would have clear dictates for who is responsible for the children. Without legal recognition of all family members, these children do not have basic supports that most children have.

State law determines who has parenting rights within a family in which both parents are not biologically related to the child. Most states do not permit two same-sex parents to have a legal connection to a child. States that do permit the entire family legal recognition do so through co-parent adoption or second-parent adoption. Co-parent adoption allows both parents to adopt a child simultaneously. Second-parent adoption allows a second parent to adopt a child that already has one legal parent (Pawelski et al., 2006). Six states and Washington D.C. have laws permitting both second-parent and joint adoption, four states have laws permitting only joint adoption, and two states have laws permitting only second-parent adoption for same-sex couples. In addition, 16 states have some counties that permit second-parent or joint adoption for same-sex couples. Florida, Mississippi, and Utah have state laws that explicitly prohibit same-sex couples from adopting. Kentucky, Ohio, Nebraska, and Wisconsin have court rulings that prohibit second-parent adoption by same-sex couples (HRC, 2010). Even when adoption is permitted, non-biological parents are not guaranteed rights because second-parent adoptions can be challenged by third parties (Buell, 2001).

Although most states deny children of same-sex couples from having two legal parents, researchers have shown that co-parenting is an asset to families. When considering the best interests of the family, permitting two parents to raise a child has a positive effect (Golombok et al., 2003). Researchers have found that parents who have a co-parent tend to report more positive parenting experiences than single parents, regardless of the parents' sexual orientation. Dual parents report less stress, less severe parent-child conflicts, more warmth, more enjoyment of parenting, and more imaginative play than single parents (Golombok et al., 2003).

The primary argument against allowing same-sex parents to both have legal rights is that LGB individuals are not able to parent as well as heterosexual parents (Badgett, 2004). However, those who have reviewed research comparing parenting skills and children's well-being of same-sex and other-sex parents have found that same-sex parents are comparable to heterosexual parents (APA 2004b; Meezan & Rauch, 2005). Most same-sex parents consider themselves to have equal parenting roles, regardless of biological relationship (Blake, 2005; Gartrell et al., 1999), and report no differences between the two parents in the quality of the parent-child relationship (Brewaeys et al, 1997). Non-biological mothers have even been found to be more involved in their children's lives in comparison to biological fathers in heterosexual families (Dundas & Kaufman, 2000; Tasker & Golombok, 1998). A review of the literature by Meezan and Rauch (2005) resulted in four conclusions regarding same-sex parenting: same-sex parents differ little when compared to heterosexual parents on measures of emotional involvement and providing healthy and supportive environments, and differences favor same-sex parents; children of same-sex parents do not tend to identify more often as LGB

or to be confused about their gender identity more than other children; children of same-sex parents are at least as healthy emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally as other children; and same-sex parents and children worry about harassment by their peers, though there is little evidence that these children have trouble with peers. Based on existing research, the American Psychological Association (2004b) put forth a resolution on same-sex parents; it stated that the APA as an organization opposes discrimination in adoption, foster care, and reproductive services based on sexual orientation, and supports legalization of joint adoptions and second-parent adoptions for same-sex parents.

In spite of the data that suggests that same-sex parents are fit parents, both parents in the family may not perceive that they are recognized equally as parents. While the majority of parents in Blake's (2005) study perceived equal parenting status, one fourth of non-legal parents felt they were secondary to the legal parent. In contrast, only three legal parents in her study felt they were secondary parents. This sentiment has been echoed by co-mothers in Israel who feel their parental status is closely tied to their limited legal rights, and they report trying to restore the balance both by obtaining all the guardian rights permitted by the law and by each giving birth to at least one child (Ben-Ari & Livni, 2006). In the United States, same-sex parents have reported that adoption legitimizes their parenting role and results in greater emotional closeness with their children (Meezan & Rauch, 2005).

Unfortunately, most same-sex couples are not both permitted parenting rights. For most same-sex couples, one partner has full legal responsibility and the other may have limited authority to handle issues as they arise. In addition to negotiating daily legal

tasks such as communicating with insurance companies about hospital bills, same-sex parents may have to make efforts to restore a sense of egalitarianism in their relationship.

Given the restrictions to full social citizenship through family rights and responsibilities, it is not surprising that sexual minority individuals and couples face specific stressors due to incomplete social and legal rights and responsibilities that define family structures and obligations. (Weber, 2008, p. 608)

These unique stressors and their outcomes can manifest in numerous ways in the lives of LGB individuals and same-sex parents.

Sexual Minority Stress

Brooks (1981) conceptualized the challenges of being a sexual minority through the lens of political constraints and institutional support for these restrictions. She explained that the stressors placed on sexual minorities begin with the mainstream culture's belief that LGB individuals are inferior. She related this to Pearlin's construct of structural stress, which explained how racial minority individuals may interpret stressful life experiences throughout their lifespan as they relate to the status of racial inferiority they are given by society. More recently, Meyer (1995, 2003) has explored the unique stressors of gay men, which he discussed as being socially based, chronic, and additive. Within a heterosexist society, LGB individuals are constantly exposed to messages of inferiority because of their sexual orientation. These pervasive messages originate from sources such as media, religion, politics, employers, healthcare providers, and families of origin. Heterosexist beliefs can affect how individuals, organizations, and governments interact with LGB people, such as whether LGB people are given benefits

equal to their heterosexual counterparts. Heterosexist messages that result in sexual minority stress are most often expressed as rejection of, discrimination against, and violence toward LGB individuals (Garnets, Herek, & Levy, 1990).

Minority stress theory has guided important research on the experiences of gay and lesbian individuals. Each component of minority stress has helped to explain mental health concerns. As researchers have begun to consider the environmental effects of minority stress on LGB individuals, increasingly discrimination has been linked to psychiatric morbidity, demoralization and guilt (Mays & Cochran, 2001; Meyer, 1995), and perceived heterosexist events have been associated with psychological distress (Szymanski, 2006). Self-concealment and self-monitoring together have explained significant variance in psychological well-being (Selvidge, Mathews, & Bridges, 2008). Internalized heterosexism has been linked to mental health issues (see Szymanski et al., 2008, for a review), and stigma has also been identified as a risk factor for distress (see Cochran, 2001, for a review). Collectively, components of minority stress can increase up to two or three times the risk for high levels of distress (Meyer, 1995). Minority stress theory has helped illuminate the powerful and pervasive role society's negative views have on life experiences of LGB individuals in specific and meaningful ways.

Sexual Minority Stress and Families

Similarly, minority stressors can impact same-sex families in multiple ways, but research in this area is limited. Same-sex parents may experience stressors related to limited parenting rights due to discriminatory laws. Researchers have found that even the process of having amendments voted on that aim to restrict legal rights increases distress for LGB individuals (Rostosky, Riggle, Horne, & Miller, 2009). Because many same-sex

parents live in areas that do not provide parenting rights to both parents, non-legal parents can face daily challenges of not being treated as parents of their own children. Some researchers have described non-legal mothers as invisible and disenfranchised because their role is not legally recognized and they lack legal power over their relationship with their children (Crawford, 1987; Muzio, 1999).

Another component of sexual minority stress is disclosure of one's sexual orientation. Both the need to disclose and the impact of disclosure on same-sex families are unique to LGB parents. Many LGB parents have said being out became more important when they became parents because disclosure legitimized their family structure (Lott-Whitehead & Tully, 1999). The process of obtaining legal documents for family protection requires that both parents disclose that they are in a same-sex relationship. Though disclosing one's sexual orientation can put the family at risk for discrimination, this risk is necessary to obtain any legal protections that are available to the family. This may also cause stress within the relationship if the partners are at different levels of comfort with disclosure (Riggle & Rostosky, 2005). Additionally, parents may risk losing custody of children in some areas of the country if they are known to be sexual minorities (Levy, 1989; van Dam, 2004). This risk may cause increased stress for some parents who may instead choose to be closeted (Pagelow, 1980). However, if the couple was closeted, the non-legal parent's relationship to his or her children is not recognized (Ben-Ari & Livni, 2006). Some parents may choose to disclose their sexual orientation to those with whom they are close but not disclose to others where a risk to the family is perceived (Casper, Schultz, & Wickens, 1992; Levy, 1989), or when it seems to be in the best interest of their children not to disclose (Hare, 1994; Lott-Whitehead & Tully, 1999).

Thus, self-disclosure by same-sex parents generally may reduce the non-legal parents' stress by validating their roles in their families when disclosure does not put their families at risk.

Only two studies to date have considered multiple components of minority stress in regard to same-sex parents. Both studies (Bos, van Balen, van den Boom, & Sandfort, 2004; Lambert 2002) of minority stress with lesbian parents found that those who experienced more minority stress also reported higher levels of distress. This is consistent with prior research with lesbians and gay men who consistently reported more psychological distress when they reported more minority stress (Meyer, 1995; Rostosky et al., 2009). Unfortunately, these studies do not provide insight into the effects of legal status on minority stress. Though approximately half of Lambert's sample reported not having legal parenting rights, she did not report whether legal status related to their experiences of minority stress. The study by Bos and her colleagues found no differences between biological and non-biological mothers, but participants most likely had parenting rights equal to those of heterosexual parents because the study was conducted in the Netherlands. Their participants on average reported low levels of rejection, perceived stigma, and internalized homophobia. In 2001 the Netherlands became the first country to give same-sex couples the same rights to marriage and adoption as heterosexual couples (HRC, 2009). Perhaps having legal parenting rights contributed to reduced sexual minority stress to the extent that no significant differences were reported between parents. The degree of sexual minority stress may differ for same-sex parents in the United States when both parents do not have legal parenting rights.

Parental Stress

In addition to sexual minority stress, same-sex parents may experience stressors that are specific to parenting (Bos, van Balen, van den Boom, & Sandfort, 2004), similar to the parental stress experienced by heterosexual parents (Lichtanski, 2004). Stress related to parenting can be chronic, as the stressors may be pervasive, ongoing, and require that families adapt to compensate for the effects of the stressors (Quittner et al., 1990). Researchers have found that stressors related to the context of a life situation are better predictors of parental adjustment than are stressful life events (Quittner et al., 1990). The stress experienced by parenting has often been explored with heterosexual parents in the context of children with disabilities or chronic health problems (e.g., Civick, 2008; Lessenberry & Rehfeldt, 2004; Quittner et al., 1990). Studies have found that higher parental stress coincides with increased levels of depression and anxiety (Conway, 2004; Quittner et al., 1990), less confidence in parenting abilities (Conway, 2004), and less satisfaction with the parenting role (Koeske & Koeske, 1990). Few researchers have considered the stress of parenting for LGB parents (Bos, van Balen, van den Boom, & Sandfort, 2004; Lichtanski, 2004), and researchers have not yet studied parental stress in the context of having limited legal parenting rights.

Non-legal same-sex parents who have more restrictions and fewer rights may experience parenting as more stressful than same-sex parents who have full parenting rights. Examples of this may be feeling frustrated by not being able to provide health insurance to their children or concern about not having custody if the parents' relationship ends. Non-legal parents may also experience stress over incidents such as not being acknowledged as a parent at their children's school. Thus, same-sex parents

without legal rights are more inclined to experience chronic stressors specifically because of their limited parenting rights. Those stressors that are related to being a sexual minority have been found to coincide with same-sex parents' experiences of more parental stress (Bos, van Balen, van den Boom, & Sandfort, 2004). As of yet, it is unknown if experiences of rejection and parental stress may differ based on legal rights, as the only research comparing parental stress levels between biological and non-biological parents was conducted in a country that provides same-sex parents with parenting rights equal to those of heterosexual married couples.

Bos, van Balen, and van den Boom (2004) identified another aspect of same-sex parenting, which the researchers described as parental justification. Although this study was conducted in a country that provides equal family rights for same-sex and other-sex relationships, the non-biological same-sex mothers reported feeling more need to justify their parenting ability than did fathers in heterosexual relationships. This researcher expects the need to justify parenting ability would be even greater for non-biological same-sex parents who do not have the assurances of legal parenting rights. When the researchers (Bos, van Balen, van den Boom, & Sandfort, 2004) explored the experiences of sexual minority stress for same-sex parents, they found no differences between biological and non-biological mothers on the need to defend their parenting ability, but those who reported more sexual minority stress reported greater parental justification. This held true for mothers who reported perceiving more stigma about being a sexual minority, for those who had experienced more rejection, and for those who had internalized messages of homophobia. Thus, regardless of whether mothers had given birth to their children or not, those experiencing sexual minority stress also experienced a

need to defend the quality of their parenting, perhaps expecting others to think they are not good parents because of their awareness of the stigma around their sexual orientation.

Social Support

Brooks encouraged the identification of internal and external resources that can mediate the experience of minority stress (1981). While considering resilience of individuals in minority groups, this theory posits that individuals are limited by the coping resources available to them in their environment (Meyer, 2003). In Meyer's (2003) theoretical model of minority stress, he suggested that social support affects the outcome of heterosexist events on psychosocial health. Social support has been found to mediate the relationship between internalized heterosexism and psychological distress (McGregor et al., 2001; Szymanski & Kashubeck-West, 2008). Increased social support has been linked to reduced internalized heterosexism (reviewed by Szymanski et al., 2008), and lesbians in relationships report fewer symptoms of psychological distress with increased social support (Kurdek, 1988). Lambert (2002) found lesbian mothers with more social support reported fewer symptoms of distress. Social support has also been identified as an important factor in mediating and/or moderating parental stress for heterosexual parents (Koeske & Koeske, 1990; Quittner et al., 1990).

One of the few studies that has explored parental stress with same-sex parents compared gay and heterosexual fathers who have adopted children. In this study, no difference was found in the level of parental stress between the two groups of fathers. However, gay fathers reported more social support than heterosexual fathers (Lichtanski, 2004). Thus, social support may help to counter the difficulties same-sex parents face, at least when they have legal parenting rights. It is unknown if the social support received

by non-legal same-sex parents would be sufficient to counter the effects of sexual minority and parental stress.

While social support seems to be an important factor, this may be a limited resource for same-sex couples. Lesbian couples have reported receiving less social support from their families of origin than heterosexual couples (Kurdek, 2004). Gay and lesbian couples report that they receive more support from their friends and their partners than from their families of origin (Kurdek, 1988). Levy (1989) found similar results with lesbian parents receiving more support from their partners and friends than family of origin. However, more recent studies have found that lesbian parents report feeling more supported by their families of origin and heterosexual friends than from the lesbian community (Gartrell et al., 1999; Hare, 1994). Lambert's (2002) study indicated that lesbian mothers feel more emotional support from their families of origin than from friends who do not have children, regardless of their sexual orientation. They also reported receiving more support from heterosexual friends with children than from those without children. Surprisingly, the participants reported more satisfaction with the support they received from heterosexual parents than from gay and lesbian friends, whether or not their friends had children.

Though few studies have considered the experiences of same-sex non-legal parents, the limited research indicates that these parents may receive less social support than same-sex legal parents. The National Lesbian Family Study (NLFS) in 1999 found that same-sex non-legal mothers felt their own mothers were not as close to their children as their partners' mothers were (Gartrell et al., 1999). The NLFS study in 2000 found that a sizable minority of the biological grandparents did not recognize their daughter's

partner as a parent to their grandchildren (Gartrell et al., 2000). These two studies indicate that non-legal parents perceive less support from their families and also receive less support from their partners' families. Considering this along with research indicating primary support may come from the family of origin, non-legal parents may receive little support in their role as parents, and therefore the limited social support may not reduce the impact of non-legal parenting status.

Most countries cite human rights as the reason for providing legal recognition of same-sex families, but legislators in the United States typically discuss well-being or harm (Badgett, 2004). Therefore, this project explored the degree of stress LGB individuals experience in their role as parents who are restricted from having legal parenting rights. Organizations have issued statements in favor of family rights and civil marriage equality, citing the harmful effects of discrimination on mental health (APA, 2004a, 2004b; ApA, 2005; Pawelski et al., 2006). In this vein, the purpose of this study was to consider specifically whether same-sex parents who are prohibited from having legal parenting rights report higher levels of sexual minority and parental stress than same-sex parents with legal parenting rights.

Chapter 3

Methods

This study examined the role of same-sex parents' legal parenting rights (legal vs. non-legal) in both sexual minority and parental stress. Legal parenting rights were defined as having one's name on the child's birth certificate or being a legal adoptive parent. Sexual minority stress included degree of outness, internalized homophobia, stigma consciousness, and experiences of harassment and discrimination. Parental stress included stress related to parenting, family worry, and parental justification. Indicators of sexual minority stress and parental stress were expected to be higher for parents without legal parenting rights.

Participants

Four hundred and eighteen individuals participated in this study. All participants were in a relationship with the same-sex partner with whom they had created a family, and they had at least one child under the age of 18 living in their home. The sample included 318 women, 97 men, and 3 transgender parents. Sixty-two percent of participants identified as lesbian, 26% identified as gay, 8% identified as bisexual, and 4% identified as queer. The average age was 40, ranging from 19 to 62. Eighty-five percent of the participants identified as Caucasian, 4.5% as Hispanic/Latina/Latino, 2.4% Asian/Pacific Islander, 2.2% African American, 1.7% Native American, 2.4% multiracial, and 2.2% biracial. Regarding education, 9.8% had doctorate degrees, 7.9% had professional degrees, 36.6% had master's degrees, 29.4% had bachelor's degrees, 11.2% had attended college, 2.6% had vocational/technical education, 1.9% had a high school diploma or GED, and .5% had not completed high school. Fifty-four percent of

participants had an income above \$50,000. The average length of same-sex parental relationship was 11.43 years, with a range of 2 to 34 years. Forty-six percent of participants reported not having a legally recognized relationship with their partner. All other participants had found one or more ways to have their relationship legally recognized, though not always in their area of residence. Nineteen percent of participants had a domestic partnership that was recognized by their area of residence, 6% had a domestic partnership that was not recognized by their area of residence, 4% had a civil union that was recognized by their area of residence, 5% had a civil union that was not recognized by their area of residence, 21% had a civil marriage that was recognized by their area of residence, 9% had a civil marriage that was not recognized by their area of residence, and 3% reported being married in California prior to Proposition 8.

[Proposition 8 is a California referendum that was passed in November 2008, defining marriage as being only between a man and a woman. This proposition prohibited same-sex marriages but did not nullify the approximately 18,000 marriages that occurred in California between the time same-sex marriage was legalized in May 2008 and the time same-sex marriage was prohibited (HRC, 2010).]

Participants who had more than one child that met the criteria of the study were asked questions about each child. The present study focused on the information gathered about the oldest child in their home that the parents had planned and parented together. Three hundred and sixty-nine of the participants had legal parenting rights, and 49 participants did not have legal parenting rights. Sixty-five percent of participants reported their state of residence permitted both same-sex parents to adopt; 10% reported only one LGBT-identified parent was allowed to adopt; 15% reported that LGBT-

identified individuals were not permitted to adopt; and 10% reported not knowing whether or not their current state of residence permitted LGBT-identified individuals to adopt. Seventy-nine percent of participants had their names on the child's birth certificate. Thirty-nine percent of participants were biological parents, 17% were primary adoptive parents, 10% were secondary adoptive parents, 18% were co-adoptive parents, 6% were legal guardians, .5% were legal parents but not currently recognized in their area of residence, 1.4% were legal parents without adopting because their names were on the child's birth certificate, and 12% had no legal parenting rights. Participants were asked what legal documentation they had obtained if they (or their partner) did not have legal parenting rights. Twenty-two percent of these participants had powers of attorney, 9.6% had co-parenting agreements, 25% had a will designating the non-legal parent as the legal guardian upon death of the legal parent, 26% reported that the legal parent's family had been notified that the non-legal parent would be the parent if the legal parent were unable to care for their child(ren) due to death or disability, and 22% had not taken any of these steps. Fifty-three percent of participants had one child living in their home, 36.6% had two children, 7.7% had three children, and 2.8% had four or more children living in their home. Though parents were included regardless of the method they used to co-create their families, co-creating was defined as having decided together to have a child and then raising the child together in their shared home. Step-families were not used in the study because of the variation and complexity in which these families are constructed (e.g., Hare & Richards, 1993).

Demographic Questions, Independent Measure, and Control Variables

Participants were asked to indicate their sex, gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, education, number and age of children, length of current relationship with partner, relationship legal status, type of legal parenting status, legal guardianship papers, and whether their area of residence permits adoption to same-sex parents. For descriptive purposes, the same demographic data was collected for partners (sex, gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and education). The following questions were asked to collect data for the independent and control variables.

Legal status. Participants were asked a researcher-generated question to assess and clarify their legal parenting status. “Are you a legal parent of your child? (Yes, birth parent; Yes, primary adoptive parent; Yes, secondary adoptive parent; Yes, co-adoptive parent; No, but I’m a legal guardian; No, not a legal parent in any jurisdiction; Yes, a legal parent but not recognized in this jurisdiction; Yes, my name is on the birth certificate.)” Those responding that they were not legal parents in any jurisdiction were coded as a 0. All other responses indicating legal parenting rights were coded as a 1. Those that indicated they were not a legal parent were asked an additional question. “If you or your partner do not have parental rights, have you and your partner done any of the following? (Completed a co-parenting agreement; Signed a power of attorney; Obtained a will indicating the non-legal parent will become the legal guardian; Communicated to the legal parent’s family that the non-legal parent is to be the parent should the legal parent be unable to care for the child; None of the above.)” Responses to this item were for descriptive purposes only.

Control variables. The control variables sex, age, education, and number of children were assessed with the following items. “What is your sex? (1 = male, 2 = female, 3 = transgendered - neither MTF nor FTM, 4 = transgender - MTF, 5 = transgender - FTM, 6 = intersex)” Age was assessed by the following question, “Please indicate your age.” (Participants filled in their current age). Education was assessed by the following question, “What is your educational background?” [no/some high school, GED/high school diploma, some college or vocational/technical school, college degree 4 years, master’s degree, doctoral degree, terminal professional degree (e.g., law, medicine)]. Finally, the number of children in the home was assessed with the following question, “How many children under the age of 18 are living in your home (regardless of whether or not you are legally considered their parent)?” (Participants chose from a drop-down list a response between 1 and 9.)

Social Support Questionnaire - Short Form (SSQ-SR; Sarason, Sarason, Shearin, & Pierce, 1987). Satisfaction with perceived social support was assessed with six items on a 6-point Likert-type scale. Items asked about the participant’s satisfaction with their social support in six areas. Responses were summed, and higher scores reflected more social support and more satisfaction with social support. A sample item is, “Think of the people whom you can really count on to distract you from your worries when you feel under stress. Please indicate how satisfied you are with the OVERALL support you have in this area.” The measure has high internal reliability (.90 to .93) and acceptable test-retest reliability. Validity was demonstrated with a high correlation to the full version of the Social Support Questionnaire and inverse correlations to multiple

depression and anxiety inventories (Sarason et al., 1987). Internal consistency for the current study was .95.

Dependent Measures

Sexual Minority Stress Measures

The Internalized Homophobia Scale (TIHS; Wright, Dye, Jiles, & Marcello, 1999). This measure consisted of nine items that were used to assess for degree of internalized homophobia. Responses were given on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Some items were reverse-scored before all responses were summed. Higher totals indicated more internalized homophobia. A sample item is “I wish that I wasn’t attracted to the same-sex.” The scale has been reported to have internal reliability of .81 (Rostosky et al., 2009), test-retest reliability coefficient of .56 (Wright & Perry, 2006), good construct validity (Rostosky & Riggle, 2002), convergent validity with distress measures, and divergent validity with self-esteem measures (Wright et al., 1999). Internal consistency for the current study was .74.

Outness (Meyer, Rossano, Ellis, & Bradford, 2002). Participants’ disclosure of their sexual orientation was measured with five items asking how out they were to family, sexual minority friends, heterosexual friends, co-workers, and health care providers. Responses were indicated on a 4-point Likert-type scale by choosing either “none, some, most, or all” for each item. Responses were summed, with higher scores indicating higher degrees of disclosure. Internal consistency has been reported as .75 (Frost & Meyer, 2009). Two additional items were added to this measure to assess for disclosure to extended family and to heterosexual parents. Internal consistency for the current study was .67.

Stigma Consciousness Questionnaire (SCQ; Pinel, 1999). The SCQ was used to assess participants' perception of discrimination with 10 items. This measure has been found to be valid for many stigmatized groups including women, gay men, lesbians, and several racial minority groups. Responses on a 7-point Likert type scale ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with some items reverse-scored, and higher total scores indicating more stigma consciousness. A sample item for LGB participants is, "Stereotypes about homosexuals have not affected me personally." The measure has demonstrated good discriminant and construct validity. Test-retest reliability was reported as .72, and internal consistency was .81 for sexual minorities (Pinel, 1999). Additional studies with gay and lesbian participants have reported alpha coefficient at .74 (Lewis, Derlega, Griffin, & Krowinski, 2003) and .65 (Lewis, Derlega, Clarke, & Kuang, 2006). Although the original SCQ used the phrase "homosexual," this has since been rephrased as LGB in other research; internal consistency was reported as .75 (Horne, 2009). Internal consistency for the current study was .78.

The Harassment & Rejection and Other Discrimination subscales of Heterosexual Harassment, Rejection, & Discrimination Scale (HHRDS; Szymanski, 2006). The HHRDS is a 14-item measure containing three subscales. The present study utilized only two of the subscales, which contained a total of 10 items. These items were responded to on a 6-point Likert-type scale, with 1 indicating "never" and 6 indicating "almost all of the time." Responses were summed, and higher scores reflected more experiences of harassment, rejection, and discrimination. The first subscale was designed to assess harassment and rejection with seven items. A sample item is, "How many times have you been rejected by your friends because you are a lesbian?" The second subscale

which assesses workplace and school discrimination with four items was not used in the present study. The third subscale measured other forms of discrimination with three items. A sample item is, “How many times have you been treated unfairly by strangers because you are a lesbian?” This measure has also been used with male participants by the author of the measure, and the word “lesbian” was replaced with “gay/bisexual man” (Szymanski, 2009). In the current study, items were reworded, replacing “lesbian” with “LGB” so the questions can be asked of all participants. Construct validity has been established based on positive correlations between the HHRDS and measures of psychological distress, depression, anxiety, somatization, and obsessive compulsiveness. Structural validity was supported by a factor analysis. Internal consistency for the full scale is .90 ($M = 1.63$; $SD = .70$) and .89, .84, and .78 for the subscales respectively (Szymanski, 2006). Similarly, internal consistency for the full scale has been reported at .91 when used with male participants (Szymanski, 2009). Internal consistency in the current study was .83 for the full scale, .81 for the harassment and rejection subscale, and .76 for the other discrimination subscale.

Parental Stress Measures

Parental Stress Scale (PSS; Berry & Jones, 1995). This 18-item measure was used to measure the level of stress related to being a parent. Responses were given on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Scores were summed after particular items were reverse-scored, and higher total scores indicated higher levels of parental stress. A sample item is, “I am happy in my role as a parent.” The authors reported adequate reliability with an alpha of .83 for internal consistency and .81 for test-retest reliability. Validity was established with correlations between the PSS

and the Perceived Stress Scale, the Parenting Stress Index (PSI), measures of satisfaction with relationship, job, and social support, and measures of loneliness, anxiety, and guilt. The PSI is the most commonly used measure of parental stress. The correlation between the PSS and the PSI was .75. The PSS is considered to be an effective measure of parental stress (Lessenberry & Rehfeldt, 2004) and has been used in many family studies. Moreover, the PSS was also used in the only study considering parental stress among same-sex parents (Lichtanski, 2004). Internal consistency of the PSS for the current study was .84.

Parental Justification (Bos, van Balen, van den Boom, & Sandfort, 2004).

This scale was a 4-item measure created by Bos and her colleagues to assess whether same-sex parents feel the need to justify their ability to parent. Responses were given on a 6-point Likert-type scale which ranges from 1 (totally disagree) to 6 (totally agree). Responses were summed, and higher total scores indicate a greater need to justify one's ability to parent. A sample item is, "As a gay/lesbian/bisexual parent, I feel that I should spend more time and be more involved in child-rearing than other parents do so I can avoid negative reactions from other people." The scale was translated into English and provided to me by the researcher, who reported Cronbach's alpha at .92 (H. M. W. Bos, personal communication, September 20, 2009). Internal consistency for the current study was .93.

Family Worry Scale (Shapiro, Peterson, & Stewart, 2009). This scale of 10 items was developed to assess both general family worries and family legal status worries. Responses were given on a 5-point Likert-type scale which ranged from 1 (not at all worrisome) to 5 (extremely worrisome) and an option for not applicable.

Responses were summed, with higher scores indicating more worry. A sample item is, “Someone challenging my partner’s rights to our children.” The scale consists of two subscales ; internal consistency alpha for the general family worries subscale (6 items) was reported at .77, and alpha for the discrimination and legal status worries subscale (4 items) was reported at .80. Internal consistency for the current study was .85 for the full scale, .79 for the general family worry subscale, and .77 for the discrimination and legal status worries subscale.

Procedure

After receiving approval from the Internal Review Board, participants were recruited nationwide via LGB community center communications, LGB parenting websites, and through the snowball effect. These various approaches were intended to reduce selection bias and increase generalizability in this non-probability sample. While the community center newsletters reach participants who are active in the LGB community, snowball sampling could potentially reach parents who were not connected to the community. Recruiting via the Internet increases opportunities for reaching sexual minority participants who may otherwise have been hidden because of the stigma associated with their sexual orientation (Meyer & Wilson, 2009). An effort was made to recruit participants of color via websites and listservs that targeted African American, Asian American, and Hispanic American same-sex parents. Emails and postings requesting participants specified that participants must be in a same-sex relationship with the partner with whom they have created a family at the time of the survey. Co-creating a family was defined as having planned together to have children, followed by one or both partners adopting a child, having a child through surrogacy, or one of the partners giving

birth to a child by a means agreed to by both partners. These parents were required to be raising the child together in one home at the time of the survey.

Participants were asked to click on a link to a webpage that described the study and provided informed consent. This page described the qualifications to participate as mentioned above. They were also told that no harm was expected to result from participation but that they would be asked to discuss family issues related to parenting. They were given this researcher's name and email address and the name of the researcher's chair in the case that they had questions about the survey. They were told that the survey would take approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete. When participants clicked "I Agree" on the informed consent page, they were redirected to an online questionnaire hosted by SurveyMonkey.com. The web pages allowed them to monitor their progress with a status bar during the survey.

Participants were asked to complete items beginning with demographic information and followed by the items for Outness, Stigma-Consciousness Questionnaire, The Internalized Homophobia Scale, Heterosexual Harassment, Rejection, and Discrimination Scale, Parental Justification measure, Parental Stress Scale, Family Worry Scale, and Social Support Questionnaire - Short Form. The final page of the survey thanked them for participating and offered to provide them a summary of the results if they chose to leave their email address, which was not linked to their responses.

Data Analysis

Preliminary analyses describe the demographics of the sample, including frequencies as well as means and standard deviations of sex, age, race, education, sexual orientation, length of relationship, relationship legal status, type of legal parenting status,

legal guardianship papers, and number of children. Multiple regressions were used to consider whether legal parenting status predicts sexual minority stress and parental stress and accounts for variance explained beyond the effects of social support, age, gender, education, and number of children living in the home. Criterion variables indicating sexual minority stress were degree of outness, internalized homophobia, stigma consciousness, and experiences of harassment and discrimination. Criterion variables indicating parental stress were scales measuring parenting stress, family worry, and parental justification. Control variables included social support, age, gender, and education. Separate regressions were run for each indicator of sexual minority stress and parental stress, and all independent variables were entered simultaneously.

Results were first checked to verify the assumptions of normality, independence, and homoscedasticity were met and that there was no problem with multicollinearity. *F*-values were used to determine if the set of independent variables explained a significant amount of the variance in the dependent variable. R^2 was assessed to determine the percentage of variance explained by the set of variables. The *t*-value indicated which variables had a significant unique relationship to the dependent variable. Beta was then used to determine the relative magnitude of the effects for each independent variable. It was expected that legal parenting rights would uniquely predict each indicator of sexual minority stress and parental stress.

Chapter 4

Results

Multiple regressions were used to assess the influence of legal parenting status on sexual minority stress and parental stress measures beyond the effects of social support, sex, age, education, and number of children in the home. Sexual minority stress was assessed by measuring internalized homophobia, stigma consciousness, degree of disclosure of sexual orientation, and experiences of discrimination and harassment. Parental stress was assessed with the Parental Stress Scale, Parental Justification Scale, and Family Worry Scale. Separate regressions were run for each criterion variable, and the independent and control variables were entered into each regression simultaneously. Preliminary results indicated no extreme multicollinearity in any of the regressions, with all variance inflation factors less than 2. The assumptions of independence, normality, and homoscedasticity were met. Sample means, standard deviations, ranges for scores, and correlations are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 Gender	1.78	0.46	--											
2 Age	40.32	7.58	-0.268***	--										
3 Education	5.56	1.28	-0.028	0.027	0.187***	--								
4 Number of children	1.63	0.87	-0.119*	0.046	-0.063	0.001	--							
5 Social support	29.57	5.35	-0.034	0.061	0.132**	-0.021	0.050	--						
6 Legal parenting status	0.88	0.32	-0.064	0.061	-0.135**	0.047	-0.161**	0.067	--					
7 Parental justification	13.53	6.05	-0.032	-0.107*	0.074	0.093	-0.25***	-0.167**	0.275***	--				
8 Family worry	28.23	8.03	0.176***	-0.205***	-0.023	-0.004	-0.161**	0.099*	0.213***	0.099*	--			
9 Parental stress	34.55	7.91	0.044	-0.057	0.023	0.162**	-0.25***	-0.168**	-0.002	-0.168**	0.006	--		
10 Outness	26.84	2.27	-0.039	-0.028	0.052	-0.050	0.094	0.114*	0.345***	0.339***	0.119*	-0.094	--	
11 Discrimination	16.60	5.81	0.076	-0.185***	-0.17***	-0.012	-0.145**	-0.019	0.104*	0.124*	0.158**	-0.215***	0.076	--
12 Internalized homophobia	15.02	4.29	0.015	-0.112*	-0.095	0.093	-0.201***	0.033	0.371***	0.215***	0.195***	-0.024	0.455***	0.098*
13 Stigma consciousness	39.89	9.65	0.091	-0.030	0.129**	-0.117*	-0.217***	0.035	0.371***	0.215***	0.195***	-0.024	0.455***	0.098*

*p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001.

Sexual Minority Stress

Regressions were first run for the criterion variables of sexual minority stress. The regression results for internalized homophobia indicated that the set of independent variables explained 6.7% of the variance, $F(6,411) = 4.95, p < .000$, with only social support having a significant unique influence ($\beta = -.198$; see Table 2). The regression results for stigma consciousness indicated that the set of independent variables explained 8.4% of the variance, $F(6,411) = 6.28, p < .000$, with three of the six variables having significant unique influences (see Table 3). In order of importance, they were social support ($\beta = -.218$), education ($\beta = .123$), and number of children in the home ($\beta = -.106$). The regression results for the harassment and rejection subscale indicated that the set of independent variables explained 6.8% of the variance, $F(6,411) = 4.96, p < .000$, with three of the six variables having significant unique influences (see Table 4). In order of importance, they were social support ($\beta = -.156$), education ($\beta = -.138$), and age ($\beta = -.129$). The regression results for the other forms of discrimination subscale indicated that the set of independent variables explained 5.1% of the variance, $F(6,411) = 3.65, p < .01$, with two of the six variables having significant unique influences (see Table 5). In order of importance, they were age ($\beta = -.129$) and education ($\beta = -.107$). The regression results for disclosure of one's sexual orientation was not significant, $F(6,411) = 2.05, p < .06$, (see Table 6).

Table 2

Results of Regression of Internalized Homophobia on Independent Variables

Independent Variables	<i>b</i>	β	<i>t</i>
Sex	-.060	-.006	-.128
Age	-.054	-.095	-1.890
Education	-.267	-.079	-1.618
Number of Children	.409	.083	1.725
Social Support	-.159	-.198	-4.140***
Legal Parenting Status	.723	.055	1.134

R-square = .067

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3

Results of Regression of Stigma Consciousness on Independent Variables

Independent Variables	<i>b</i>	β	<i>t</i>
Sex	1.499	.071	1.442
Age	-.025	-.020	-.396
Education	.932	.123	2.537*
Number of Children	-1.178	-.106	-2.231*
Social Support	-.393	-.218	-4.602***
Legal Parenting Status	1.190	.040	.837

R-square = .084

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4

Results of Regression of Harassment and Rejection Subscale on Independent Variables

Independent Variables	<i>b</i>	β	<i>t</i>
Sex	-.018	-.002	-.036
Age	-.079	-.129	-2.569*
Education	-.502	-.138	-2.825**
Number of Children	-.809	-.017	-.348
Social Support	-.134	-.156	-3.256**
Legal Parenting Status	.285	.020	.414

R-square = .068

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 5

Results of Regression of Other Discrimination Subscale on Independent Variables

Independent Variables	<i>b</i>	β	<i>t</i>
Sex	.366	.089	1.762
Age	-.032	-.129	-2.543*
Education	-.159	-.107	-2.167*
Number of Children	-.029	-.013	-.276
Social Support	-.016	-.044	-.913
Legal Parenting Status	.051	.009	.180

R-square = .051

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 6

Results of Regression of Outness on Independent Variables

Independent Variables	<i>b</i>	β	<i>t</i>
Sex	-.246	-.050	-.976
Age	-.107	-.058	-1.134
Education	.079	.044	.886
Number of Children	-.144	-.055	-1.123
Social Support	.037	.088	1.813
Legal Parenting Status	.744	.106	2.160

R-square = .029

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Parental Stress

Regressions were then run for the criterion variables of parental stress. The regression results for parental stress indicated that the set of independent variables explained 9.8% of the variance, $F(6,411) = 7.46, p < .000$, with two of the six variables having significant unique influences (see Table 7). In order of importance, they were social support ($\beta = -.246$) and number of children in the home ($\beta = .163$). The regression results for parental justification indicated that the set of independent variables explained 5.5% of the variance, $F(6,411) = 4.02, p < .01$, with four of the six variables having significant unique influences (see Table 8). In order of importance, they were age ($\beta = -.138$), social support ($\beta = -.125$), education ($\beta = .114$), and number of children in the home ($\beta = .097$). The regression results for general family worry indicated that the set of independent variables explained 10.1% of the variance, $F(6,411) = 7.70, p < .000$, with three of the six variables having significant unique influences (see Table 9). In order of importance, they were social support ($\beta = -.185$), education ($\beta = -.183$), and sex ($\beta = .156$). The regression results for worry related to discrimination and legal issues indicated that the set of independent variables explained 17.1% of the variance, $F(6,411) = 14.13, p < .000$, with three of the six variables having significant unique influences (see Table 10). In order of importance, they were age ($\beta = -.209$), legal parenting status ($\beta = -.199$), and education ($\beta = -.191$).

Table 7

Results of Regression of Parental Stress on Independent Variables

Independent Variables	<i>b</i>	β	<i>t</i>
Sex	.826	.048	.978
Age	-.050	-.048	-.962
Education	.210	.034	.704
Number of Children	1.475	.163	3.434**
Social Support	-.363	-.246	-5.236***
Legal Parenting Status	1.775	.073	1.536

R-square = .098

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 8

Results of Regression of Parental Justification on Independent Variables

Independent Variables	<i>b</i>	β	<i>t</i>
Sex	-.833	-.063	-1.259
Age	-.110	-.138	-2.726**
Education	.539	.114	2.305*
Number of Children	.672	.097	2.000*
Social Support	-1.42	-.125	-2.608**
Legal Parenting Status	-1.289	-.069	-1.426

R-square = .055

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 9

Results of Regression of General Family Worry Subscale on Independent Variables

Independent Variables	<i>b</i>	β	<i>t</i>
Sex	1.631	.156	3.182**
Age	-.011	-.017	-.335
Education	-.687	-.183	-3.794***
Number of Children	.073	.013	.280
Social Support	-.166	-.185	-3.950***
Legal Parenting Status	-.326	-.022	-.466

R-square = .101

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 10

Results of Regression of Worry about Discrimination and Legal Issues on Independent Variables

Independent Variables	<i>b</i>	β	<i>t</i>
Sex	.577	.063	1.347
Age	-.115	-.209	-4.408***
Education	-.626	-.191	-4.138***
Number of Children	-.039	-.008	-.178
Social Support	-.051	-.065	-1.448
Legal Parenting Status	-2.562	-.199	-4.378***

R-square = .171

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Following is a discussion of the results of this study, considered within the existing body of research. First, participants' experiences of sexual minority stress will be discussed, followed by their experiences of parental stress. Limitations of this study, implications for clinical consideration, and directions for future research will then be highlighted.

Sexual Minority Stress

Contrary to the hypotheses in this study, experiences of sexual minority stress were similar for same-sex parents, regardless of legal parenting rights. Non-legal status did not predict significantly more internalized homophobia, stigma consciousness, experiences of harassment, rejection, or discrimination, or degree of disclosing their sexual orientation than legal same-sex parents. Thus, being prevented from having legal parenting rights does not appear to be related to same-sex parents' beliefs and emotions about themselves or other LGBT individuals, and non-legal parents were just as disclosing about their sexual identities.

Social support seemed to play the most significant role in ameliorating sexual minority stress, as this factor was most influential for internalized homophobia, stigma consciousness, and experiences of harassment, rejection, and discrimination. Social support was also a critical factor in how out same-sex parents were to their extended families. These findings are consistent with prior research that has indicated social support is an important factor in reducing sexual minority stress (Kurdek, 1988; Lambert, 2002; Szymanski & Kashubeck-West, 2008).

Although same-sex parents who had more formal education had fewer experiences of discrimination, they admitted to having a more stigmatized view of being a sexual minority. Those who have more education may be more aware discriminatory laws and restricted legal rights of sexual minorities, leading to feeling more stigma about being a sexual minority. Parents who associated more stigma with being LGBT tended to have fewer children. Perhaps these parents choose to have fewer children because of their concern about the stigma their children may experience. Alternately, these findings may simply reflect the trend among the general population for more highly educated individuals to have fewer children. Although it may be that there is a positive relationship between number of children and level of education ($r = -.06$), the correlation was not statistically significant.

Parental Stress

Same-sex parents without legal parenting rights expressed significantly more concern about legal issues and discrimination related to their families than did legal parents. However, non-legal parents did not report worrying more about general family issues than parents with legal parenting rights. These results are consistent with the findings of Shapiro and colleagues (2009), who found in their study with lesbian mothers that the legal and social context in which mothers lived impacts family worry. They found that lesbian mothers in the United States reported more worry about family legal issues and discrimination but not about general family issues than did lesbian mothers in Canada where legal relationship recognition and parenting rights are available to same-sex couples. Same-sex parents whose legal rights are restricted experience more concern specifically about the potential effects of their lack of legal rights.

A number of other factors appeared to be indicators of parents who worry more about family issues. Parents who were younger and those with less education expressed more worry about family legal and discriminatory issues. Older more educated parents may have more resources and knowledge about their rights, which may empower them to reduce their concern about legal issues. Perhaps they have a better understanding of the risks of not being a legal parent and know what steps can be taken to legally protect their parenting relationship, such as co-parenting agreements. Fathers and more educated parents reported less general family worry than mothers and those with lower incomes. These results are not surprising since lack of financial resources can cause concern about providing for one's family, and women have been found to express more worry than men (e.g., McCann, Stewin, & Short, 1991).

Social support was also an important factor in the extent of family worry. When parents reported less social support, they reported greater general worry about their families. However, social support did not relate to the degree of worry about family legal and discriminatory issues, suggesting that having greater support of one's family may not be enough to reduce significant feelings of worry related to concerns about parenting rights and security. In a recent qualitative study on sexual minority stress (Levitt et al., 2010), participants described that social support can be of great benefit but it does not change the negative impact of not having rights as sexual minorities. Thus, participants expressed feeling disempowered in spite of receiving social support. Regardless of the degree of social support same-sex parents receive, same-sex parents without legal rights will most likely carry the burden of worry about their rights and privileges as a parent.

Participants reported more stress related to parenting when they had more children in the home and less social support. Both indicators of parental stress are consistent with past research with heterosexual parents. Parents tend to report more stress when they have more children in their home (Taylor et al., 2007), and social support has been found to protect against parental stress (Koeske & Koeske, 1990; Quittner et al., 1990). These findings reflect the similarities between heterosexual and same-sex parents in what factors are related to greater parental stress, and what may protect against such stress. Legal status was not predictive of parental stress, indicating that in this sample, not being legally recognized as a parent did not appear to relate to parents' feelings about parenting.

Parental justification was higher for parents who were younger and had less social support, more children in their home, and more formal education. However, parents without legal parenting rights did not express more need to justify the quality of their parenting than legal parents. These findings are similar to Bos and colleagues' (2004a) results with biological mothers and social mothers in the Netherlands. No differences were found for parental justification in their sample of mothers, and their speculation was that this was related to the general supportive climate of the Netherlands, and the fact that both biological and social mothers were legally related to their children. However, this study's finding that there was no relationship between legal status and parental justification suggests that both non-legal and legal parents consider themselves to be full parents who are just as good at parenting as heterosexual parents. These results may reflect the resilience and conviction that same-sex parents demonstrate despite legal limitations and social stigma.

Overall, this study indicates that the experiences of same-sex parents who do not have legal rights is similar to the experiences of same-sex parents who do have legal rights except that non-legal parents worry to a greater degree about legal and discriminatory issues. While prior research has shown that same-sex parents do experience sexual minority stressors and parenting stress, the current study reflects that these stressors are experienced similarly by same-sex parents, regardless of legal parenting rights. Thus, having legal parenting rights does not necessarily reduce the experiences of sexual minority stress for LGBT individuals, though other factors such as social support can help LGBT individuals cope with being a member of a stigmatized group (Kurdek, 1988; Lambert, 2002; Szymanski & Kashubeck-West, 2008). Additionally, these results may demonstrate the resilience of same-sex parents in the face of being limited from having legal parenting rights. While they may be lacking in legal rights as same-sex parents, non-legal status did not relate to more stigma consciousness, being less out, possessing greater internalized homophobia, parental stress or proving to others that one is justified to be a parent than same-sex parents with legal parenting rights in this study.

Future Research

The present study's indications that non-legal parents are concerned about legal issues but that they do not experience increased levels of stress begs the question of how they are managing this worry. Researchers may want to learn what mediates or moderates non-legal parents' worry about legal issues since they do not report experiencing greater parenting stress or sexual minority stress than legal parents. One avenue to explore is the extent of perceived social support, as this has been identified as a

mediator for psychological distress (Szymanski & Kashubeck-West, 2008). Another possible strategy to lessen worry could be non-legal parents utilizing legal resources that provide partial rights, such as co-parenting agreements and legal guardianship papers. Researchers may also explore qualitatively how non-legal parents' concern about legal issues and discrimination impacts themselves and their families.

Researchers could investigate the sources of same-sex parents' social support to increase the understanding of how social support is helpful in reducing sexual minority stress. As Meyer (2003) highlighted the importance of social support in relation to sexual minority stress, he mentioned the following research on community-level support. Jones and colleagues in 1984 suggested social support from within the community may help individuals by being in a setting where they do not feel their identity is stigmatized and where they can receive support for their minority status. Pettigrew in 1967 suggested being a part of a community could help individuals judge themselves against others within their community rather than against the general population. Alternately, if same-sex parents are receiving their primary support from their families, researchers may ask whether levels of social support have changed since having children, as they do in Israel where lesbians report having more social support after having children (Ben-Ari & Livni, 2006).

Participants in the current study reported a high level of social support. Same-sex parents who have less social support may be more difficult to find, and they may have very different experiences of parental stress and sexual minority stress since social support appears to be a critical element in reducing levels of stress. Involving these

parents in a study of same-sex parenting may better highlight the needs of same-sex parents who do not have legal parenting rights.

Researchers may also want to explore the experiences of legal same-sex parents who are partnered with non-legal same-sex parents to assess how they may be affected by being the only parent in the family with legal parenting rights. These legal parents may experience more parental stress or sexual minority stress than same-sex parents whose partners have legal parenting rights, considering the additional responsibilities that one parent would have. Alternately, legal same-sex parents' concern may be limited to legal issues for their partners, as was the concern by non-legal parents in the present study. Researchers could compare same-sex couples where both partners have legal parenting rights to couples where only one partner has legal parenting rights to assess whether couples experience more concern about legal issues when one partner's rights are restricted.

Researchers in the United States should consider whether same-sex parents with higher sexual minority stress experience higher parental stress. A study in the Netherlands found that those with more sexual minority stress reported more parental stress and parental justification (Bos et al., 2004a). Correlations in the present study showed strong relationships between experiences of sexual minority stress and feeling the need to justify their quality of parenting. Similarly, higher levels of parental stress correlated with higher levels of sexual minority stress. It may be that sexual minority stress mediates the relationship between experiences of stigma and discrimination and parental stress.

Finally, the construction of a comprehensive measure of sexual minority stress would allow for a better understanding of how this construct affects or is affected by other factors. A single instrument would provide consistency in future research, as previous researchers have chosen to include different elements identified as minority stressors. The process of developing a measure would also indicate whether disclosure of sexual orientation is a component of sexual minority stress as Meyer suggested in 2003 or if it is a factor that affects or is affected by sexual minority stress.

Limitations

While a concerted effort was made to include experiences of same-sex parents of varied racial backgrounds and education and income levels, ultimately our participants were predominantly White, highly educated, and middle to upper middle class. Thus, results from this study may not be generalized to same-sex parents with multiple minority statuses nor those who lack the privileges of education and income. The majority of participants was also female and most had legal parenting rights to their children. Participants were recruited via support networks such as community centers and websites. Parents in this study reported receiving a high level of social support and so may not fully represent the experiences of same-sex parents who are not as well supported. Participants were also self-selected, preventing us from gathering experiences from same-sex parents who were disinterested in sharing this family information. These parents were also primarily out about their sexual identities (provide $M = 26.84$; Range = 7-28); therefore, this sample may not be reflective of the large number of same-sex parents raising children in areas of the country where being out is not as common. In fact, 22% of our participants were from California and Massachusetts where same-sex parents

are treated equally under state law. Perhaps non-legal parents who had more stressful experiences chose not to participate. Notably, 63 legal parents stated that their partners did not have legal rights, yet we only had 50 non-legal parents participate. Therefore, our sample primarily was made up of parents with legal rights. As with most studies, the data was gathered through self-report, and measures had a high degree of face validity, leaving the possibility that participants' responses may have been influenced by social desirability. Finally, results were calculated with multiple regressions, which does not allow for testing causation or considering all the components of parental stress and sexual minority stress simultaneously since there is currently not a comprehensive measure of sexual minority stress.

Clinical Implications

This study highlights the importance of social support in helping same-sex parents cope with sexual minority stress and with parenting stress, while also showing that no amount of social support can prevent parents without legal parenting rights from worrying about family legal issues and concerns about discrimination. Thus, clinicians may encourage same-sex parents to develop a support network to help them cope with the stressors of being sexual minority parents while also validating that those without legal parenting rights may need to find ways to manage their worry about the lack of legal rights. Some same-sex parents may find empowerment that comes from activism (Levitt et al, 2010), though clinicians should discuss with clients the need to be aware of whether their fight for social justice is adding to or reducing the client's stress (Levitt et al, 2009). Clinicians should be aware that same-sex parents who do not have legal parenting rights, are younger, and have more children at home may be more susceptible to experiences of

parental stress, parental justification, or family worry. Though we do not know from the present study what impact these experiences may have on psychological health, past research has indicated same-sex parents living within a more repressive social and legal context may experience more family worry and more depressive symptoms than same-sex parents in a country that provides equal rights to same-sex parents (Shapiro, Peterson, & Stewart, 2009).

The clinician's approach should acknowledge the affects of systemic problems within the social context that are outside the client's control, yet affect the client and his or her family (Adams, Jaques, & May, 2004). Same-sex parents may be faced with discrimination, harassment, stigma, or lack of support or recognition for their family. Some parents may internalize the negative messages, and some may choose to not disclose to others their sexual orientation and who their family members are as a way to protect their family from harassment or discrimination (Adams et al, 2004; Gartrell, Deck, Rodas, Peyser, & Banks, 2005; Lott-Whitehead & Tully, 1999). Clinicians working with same-sex parents should keep in mind an additional burden of worry that one parent in the family may have due to this lack of rights. Clinicians should explore with partners who do not have the same legal parenting rights what impact this discrepancy has on their couple relationship and their roles in the family. It is possible that such discrepancy may increase responsibilities for the legal parent and/or may contribute to feelings of inequality experienced by the non-legal parent.

Summary and Conclusions

Results of this study were that same-sex parents without legal parenting rights worry more than legal parents about legal family issues and discrimination, but non-legal

status does not predict worrying about general family issues. Additionally, same-sex parents who reported greater social support reported less parenting stress and sexual minority stress than did parents with less social support. The study demonstrates that same-sex parents are effectively able to manage their stress in spite of the legal restrictions they may have. The social support they receive appears to be helpful in all areas of parental stress and sexual minority stress with the exception of worry about legal family issues and discrimination. This concern about legal issues may only be reduced or eliminated by the granting of legal parenting rights to all same-sex parents.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent

Principal Investigator: Teresa Reeves, M.S.

Description of the study:

Participants in this study will be asked to complete an online survey that will require approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete. The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of same-sex parents who are raising children together.

Qualifications:

To participate in this study, participants must be at least 18 years of age, be living in the United States, and currently be in a relationship with the same-sex partner with whom they have created a family. Though parents will be included regardless of the method they used to create their families, co-creating is defined as having decided together to have a child and then raising the child together in their shared home. Participants must have at least one child who is still a minor and living in the home at the time of the study.

Risks:

There are no foreseeable risks to individuals for participating in this study. Individuals may feel mildly uncomfortable by reflecting on limited legal rights.

Benefits:

Participants may benefit from participation in this study by developing a greater awareness of their situation as same-sex parents by reflecting on their situation as parents. Participants may also benefit by knowing they are contributing to research that is GLBT-affirmative and supports equal rights.

Confidentiality:

Participation will be anonymous. Volunteers will complete online surveys which do not ask for participants' names.

Questions:

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact the principal investigator, Teresa Reeves, M.S. at (901) 497-9718 or reeves.teresa@gmail.com. You may also contact her faculty advisor Sharon Horne, Ph.D. at (901) 678-1413. Questions about your rights as a research participant may also be directed to the Chair of the Committee for the Protection of Human Research Participants of the University of Memphis at (901) 678-2533.

Terminating the study:

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Beginning the survey in no way obligates participants to complete the survey. Participants may quit the study at any time with no consequences.

Concluding Statement:

By completing the survey I acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age, have read and understood the above statements, and have decided to take part in the study.

Click agree to continue.

Appendix B

Demographic Page

1. What is your sex/gender?
 - male
 - female
 - transgender M2F
 - transgender F2M
 - intersex

1. What is your partner's sex/gender?
 - male
 - female
 - transgender M2F
 - transgender F2M
 - intersex

3. How do you identify your sexual orientation?
 - gay
 - lesbian
 - bisexual
 - heterosexual
 - queer
 - asexual
 - questioning

4. How does your partner identify his/her sexual orientation?
 - gay
 - lesbian
 - bisexual
 - heterosexual
 - queer
 - asexual
 - questioning

5. What is your age in years? ____

6. What is your partner's age in years? ____

7. What is your race/ethnicity?
- African American
 - White
 - Hispanic
 - Asian/Pacific Islander
 - Native American
 - Biracial
 - Multiracial
8. How would you describe your partner's race/ethnicity?
- African American
 - White
 - Hispanic
 - Asian/Pacific Islander
 - Native American
 - Biracial
 - Multiracial
9. What is your educational background?
- No/Some high school
 - GED/ High school diploma
 - Vocational/Technical School (2 years)
 - Some college
 - College degree (4 years)
 - Master's degree (e.g., M.S., M.ed., M.A.)
 - Doctoral degree (e.g., Ph.D., Psy.D., E.D.D.)
 - Professional degree (e.g., M.D., J.D.)
10. What is your partner's educational level?
- No/Some high school
 - GED/ High school diploma
 - Vocational/Technical School (2 years)
 - Some college
 - College degree (4 years)
 - Master's degree (e.g., M.S., M.ed., M.A.)
 - Doctoral degree (e.g., Ph.D., Psy.D., E.D.D.)
 - Professional degree (e.g., M.D., J.D.)
11. How many years have you been in your current relationship with your partner? ____
12. How many children under the age of 18 are living in your home (regardless of whether or not you are legally considered their parent)? ____

13. Does your area of residence permit adoption to same-sex parents?
- Yes, to both parents (including second parent/co-parent adoptions)
 - Yes, to only one parent
 - No
 - Unknown

Appendix C

Legal Status

1. Are you a legal parent to your child? (check all that apply)
 - yes, biological parent
 - yes, primary adoptive parent
 - yes, secondary adoptive parent
 - yes, co-adoptive parent
 - no, but I'm a legal guardian
 - no, not a legal parent in any jurisdiction
 - yes, but not recognized in my current jurisdiction
2. If you or your partner do not have parental rights, have you and your partner done any of the following? (check all that apply)
 - Completed a co-parenting agreement with an attorney specifying you both have the role of co-parent
 - Signed a power of attorney agreement to give both partners rights over medical and school decisions
 - Obtained a will indicating the non-legal parent will become the legal guardian should the legal parent die or become unable to care for your child
 - Communicated to the legal parent's family that the non-legal parent is to be the parent should the legal parent die or become unable to care for your child
 - None of the above
3. Is your name on your child's birth certificate?
 - yes
 - no
4. What level of legal recognition do you have with your partner? (check all that apply)
 - None
 - Domestic Partnership recognized by my jurisdiction
 - Domestic Partnership not recognized by my jurisdiction, but recognized elsewhere
 - Civil Union recognized by my state
 - Civil Union not recognized by my state, but recognized elsewhere
 - Civil Marriage recognized by my state
 - Civil Marriage not recognized by my state, but recognized elsewhere

Appendix D

Outness

How out are you about your sexual orientation?	none	some	most	all
1. How out are you to your family?				
2. How out are you to your extended family?				
3. How out are you to your LGBT friends?				
4. How out are you to your heterosexual friends?				
5. How out are you at work?				
6. How out are you to your health care providers?				
7. How out are you to heterosexual parents?				

Appendix E

Stigma-Consciousness Questionnaire

responses:

(1) strongly disagree

(2) somewhat disagree

(3) slightly disagree

(4) neither agree nor disagree

(5) slightly agree

(6) somewhat agree

(7) strongly agree

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Stereotypes about GLB people have not affected me personally.							
2. I never worry that my behaviors will be viewed as stereotypical of GLB people.							
3. When interacting with heterosexuals who know of my sexual preference, I feel like they interpret all my behaviors in terms of the fact that I am GLB.							
4. Most heterosexuals do not judge GLB people on the basis of their sexual preference.							
5. My being GLB does not influence how GLB people act with me.							
6. I almost never think about the fact that I am GLB when I interact with heterosexuals.							
7. My being GLB does not influence how people act with me.							
8. Most heterosexuals have a lot more homophobic thoughts than they actually express.							
9. I often think that heterosexuals are unfairly accused of being homophobic.							
10. Most heterosexuals have a problem viewing GLB people as equals.							

Appendix F

The Internalized Homophobia Scale

responses:

(1) strongly disagree

(2) disagree

(3) neither agree nor disagree

(4) agree

(5) strongly agree

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.	1	2	3	4	5
1. I have a positive attitude about being gay/lesbian/bisexual.					
2. I feel uneasy around people who are very open in public about being gay/lesbian/bisexual.					
3. I often feel ashamed that I am gay/lesbian/bisexual.					
4. For the most part, I enjoy being a gay/lesbian/bisexual.					
5. I worry a lot about what others think about my being gay/lesbian/bisexual.					
6. I feel proud that I am gay/lesbian/bisexual.					
7. I feel that being gay/lesbian/bisexual is a sin.					
8. I wish that I weren't attracted to the same sex.					
9. I feel that being gay/lesbian/bisexual is a gift.					

Appendix G

Heterosexual Harassment, Rejection, and Discrimination Scale

responses:

- (1) never (2) once in a while (3) sometimes
 (4) often (5) most of the time (6) almost all of the time

Please think carefully about events that have occurred in the PAST YEAR and answer the following questions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
1. How many times have you been treated unfairly by people in service jobs (ex. waiters, bank tellers) because you are LGB?							
2. How many times have you been treated unfairly by strangers because you are LGB?							
3. How many times have you been treated unfairly by people in helping jobs (ex. doctors, therapists) because you are LGB?							
4. How many times have you been treated unfairly by your family because you are LGB?							
5. How many times have you been called a HETEROSEXIST name like dyke, lezzie, fag, queer or other names?							
6. How many times have you been made fun of, picked on, pushed, shoved, hit, or threatened with harm because you are LGB?							
7. How many times have you been rejected by family members because you are LGB?							
8. How many times have you been rejected by friends because you are LGB?							
9. How many times have you heard ANTI-LESBIAN/ ANTI-GAY remarks from family members?							

Please think carefully about events that have occurred in the PAST YEAR and answer the following questions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
10. How many times have you been verbally insulted because you are LGB?							

Appendix H

Parental Justification Measure

responses:

(1) totally disagree

(2) somewhat disagree

(3) slightly disagree

(4) slightly agree

(5) somewhat agree

(6) totally agree

As an LGB parent, please consider your experiences when answering the following questions.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. As an LGB parent, I feel that I have to defend to others that I am a good parent.						
2. As an LGB parent, I feel that I should spend more time and be more involved in child-rearing than other parents do so I can avoid negative reactions from other people.						
3. As an LGB parent, I have to do more than other parents because I have to prove to other people that everything is going well with my child.						
4. As an LGB parent, I feel that I have more to live up to than other parents do.						

Appendix I

Parental Stress Scale

responses:

(1) strongly disagree

(2) disagree

(3) neutral

(4) agree

(5) strongly agree

Being a parent naturally brings its own unique challenges. We would like to hear about your experiences of parenting.	1	2	3	4	5
1. I am happy in my role as a parent.					
2. There is little or nothing I wouldn't do for my child(ren) if it was necessary.					
3. Caring for my child(ren) sometimes takes more energy than I have to give.					
4. I sometimes worry whether I am doing enough for my child(ren).					
5. I feel close to my child(ren).					
6. I enjoy spending time with my child(ren).					
7. My child(ren) is (are) an important source of affection for me.					
8. Having children gives me a more certain and optimistic view for the future.					
9. The major source of stress in my life is my child(ren).					
10. Having children leaves little time and flexibility in my life.					
11. Having children has been a financial burden.					
12. It is difficult to balance different responsibilities because of my child(ren).					

Being a parent naturally brings its own unique challenges. We would like to hear about your experiences of parenting.	1	2	3	4	5
13. The behavior of my child(ren) is often embarrassing or stressful to me.					
14. If I had it to do over again, I might decide not to have children.					
15. I feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of being a parent.					
16. Having children has meant having too few choices and too little control over my life.					
17. I am satisfied as a parent.					
18. I find my child(ren) enjoyable.					

Appendix J

Social Support Questionnaire - Short Form

responses:

- | | | |
|------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| (1) very dissatisfied | (2) dissatisfied | (3) somewhat dissatisfied |
| (4) somewhat satisfied | (5) satisfied | (6) very satisfied |

For the following questions, please think about all the individuals in your life who provide you with help or support. Please indicate how satisfied you are with the OVERALL level of support you receive in these areas of your life.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Think of the people whom you can really count on to distract you from your worries when you feel under stress. Please indicate how satisfied you are with the OVERALL support you have in this area.						
2. Think about the people whom you can really count on to help you feel more relaxed when you are under pressure or tense. Please indicate how satisfied you are with the OVERALL support you have in this area.						
3. Think about the people who accept you totally, including both your worst and your best points. Please indicate how satisfied you are with the OVERALL support you have in this area.						
4. Think about the people whom you can really count on to care about you, regardless of what is happening to you. Please indicate how satisfied you are with the OVERALL support you have in this area.						

For the following questions, please think about all the individuals in your life who provide you with help or support. Please indicate how satisfied you are with the OVERALL level of support you receive in these areas of your life.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Think about the people whom you can really count on to help you feel better when you are feeling generally "down-in-the-dumps". Please indicate how satisfied you are with the OVERALL support you have in this area.						
6. Think about the people whom you count on to console you when you are very upset. Please indicate how satisfied you are with the OVERALL support you have in this area.						

Appendix K

Family Worry Scale

responses:

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| (1) not at all worrisome | (2) a little worrisome | (3) moderately worrisome |
| (4) quite worrisome | (5) extremely worrisome | (6) not applicable |

The following are some common worries that adults may encounter. Please rate how much of a concern each issue is for you.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Being able to financially support the family						
2. Someone challenging my partner's rights to our children						
3. Having health problems						
4. Being allowed to make important decisions about my partner's well-being in the case of a medical emergency						
5. Saving enough for retirement						
6. Losing my rights to my children						
7. My children being exposed to negative influences outside the home						
8. My children being successful in their adult lives						
9. My children being surrounded by people who do not approve of my relationship						
10. One of my children getting hurt						